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ACTION EUR-00

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	PDI-00	DS-00	EB-00	FAAE-00	UTED-00	VCI-00	H-00
	TEDE-00	INR-00	L-00	VCIE-00	DCP-00	NSAE-00	ISN-00
	NSCE-00	OMB-00	NIMA-00	EPAU-00	PA-00	PM-00	GIWI-00
	PRS-00	P-00	SCT-00	ISNE-00	DOHS-00	SP-00	IRM-00
	SSO-00	SS-00	TRSE-00	T-00	FMP-00	R-00	EPAE-00
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 FM AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2541
 INFO USMISSION USNATO

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FOR EUR/NB
 INFO EUR/PPD; EUR/INR/MR

E.O. 12958: N/A
 TAGS: PREL, MARR, KPAO, OPRC, IC
 SUBJECT: ICELAND: NEW FLAREUP IN ICELANDIC PARLIAMENT OVER
 RENDITION FLIGHTS

REF: 05 REYKJAVIK 00514

1. SUMMARY: In a 26 January parliamentary debate recalling similar arguments in December 2005, opposition MPs slammed PM Asgrimsson and FM Haarde for accepting Washington assurances that the U.S. did not torture prisoners or transport them for the purposes of torture. Ministers said that the accusations were unproven; that Icelandic and U.S. officials had discussed the issue; and that they believed Secretary Rice's December 5 statement on the topic. Asgrimsson said that should the investigation by the Council of Europe produce fresh evidence, then Iceland might ask more questions of the United States. END SUMMARY

2. Both state-run TV Channel One and privately-owned TV Channel Two ran stories January 25 on the "CIA prison flight" issue, quoting Icelandic aviation authorities as saying that the number of such flights was 121, a figure the broadcasters noted was "much higher than originally thought."

3. The Althingi (Parliament) was the venue for a heated debate on January 26, between Prime Minister Halldor

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Asgrmsson and Foreign Minister Geir H. Haarde, on one side, defending the government's acceptance of Secretary Rice's explanation of the rendition process (reftel), and opposition MPs, demanding that Iceland take a stronger stand against the U.S. The conservative newspaper Morganbladi reported on the debate January 27 under the headline "Opposition Demands Clear Answers from the US Regarding Illegal Prison Flights; Minister for Foreign Affairs says There's No Reason to Doubt U.S. Statements Regarding the Flights."

4. FM Geir Haarde (Independence Party) reiterated statements he had made in December 2005 that there was no evidence of illegal prison flights entering Icelandic airspace. Furthermore, he said, the Icelandic government did not have any more reason than other countries to doubt the December 5 statement by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice about the detainee process.

5. In a vociferous debate, opposition MPs (consisting of the Alliance, Left Green and Liberal parties) demanded that Iceland seek more specific answers from the United States on the issue, and said the U.S. should respond as to whether "CIA airplanes" had flown to countries where torture is allowed. They also repeated calls for the U.S. to say whether Icelandic airspace or airports had been used for such flights. Ossur Skarphedinsson, MP from the Alliance, spoke about the Council of Europe report by Dick Marty, a Swiss senator. Skarpedinsson demanded a written answer from the U.S. in answer to allegations in the report about detainee flights.

6. Haarde quoted from Secretary Rice's statement that the U.S. does not use foreign airports or airspace to transport prisoners to countries where they will be tortured. Prime Minister Halldor Asgrmsson (Progressive) said that Haarde had requested answers from the USG and that Secretary Rice had issued a statement on the rendition process. Moreover, the Prime Minister pointed out that the report by Mr. Marty was not a final report. He said no new evidence had come forth, and that Iceland is not going to demand any more answers at this point. Should the investigation by the Council of Europe produce fresh evidence, then Iceland might ask more questions of the United States.

7. MP Ogmundur Jonasson (Left Green) rhetorically asked the Prime Minister when he would stop speaking as a spokesman for the Pentagon and for the U.S. Administration, and when would he start to speak in the name of the Icelandic nation. Jonasson added that "everyone knows" the U.S. tortures

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prisoners and that prisoners are transported from the U.S. to other countries where they are tortured.

8. Haarde responded that Iceland's reaction was similar to that of other European countries. He said Icelandic and American officials have spoken nine times on the phone about those issues between October 13 and December 5. "When I was at the meeting of ministers at the OSCE, I spoke to Undersecretary of State Nick Burns about the issue. Later that day, the Secretary of State issued a statement, responding to the allegations. Icelandic authorities do not have any more reasons than other states to doubt the statement by Secretary of State Rice that she later repeated at another meeting with me and other NATO countries' foreign ministers."

9. MP Thorunn Sveinbjarnardottir, (Alliance), said there was a lot of debate about what was legal and illegal when it

comes to these issues. "The U.S. government's definition of what is legal and illegal in these matters is different from international law and international agreements" he said. "The U.S. has redefined torture and... terrorism, as well. For example, they say that having plastic film over one's mouth and pouring water over a person until they feel like they're about to drown is not torture, according to the U.S. government's definition. Hence, we need to know where the airplanes landed and who received them when they landed."

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